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PREFATORY NOTE.

The following pamphlet, printed in Washington in the year 1804, and published anonymously, is established by collateral evidence to have been written by Thomas Law, one of the earliest and wealthiest of the first proprietors of Washington. Mr. Law was, perhaps, the foremost promoter of this canal scheme, for joining the waters of the Potomac with the Eastern Branch, by a water-way running through the city. At that day, the Eastern Branch had a good depth of water, and was navigable as far as Bladensburg.

The charter of incorporation of "The Washington Canal Company" named as incorporators, Thomas Tingey, Daniel Carroll, of Duddington; Thomas Law, and Daniel Carroll Brent, and became a law by the signature of President Jefferson, May 1, 1802.

This charter, and certain statistics and letters relating to the projected canal, contained in the "Appendix" referred to by Mr. Law, are omitted in this reprint from want of room.

COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATION.

OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
INTENDED CANAL
IN
WASHINGTON CITY.

City of Washington,

1804.

OBSERVATIONS, &c.

STRANGERS who came to this city a few years ago, and who made enquiry respecting it, were informed that the Eastern Branch harbor was almost stopped at the mouth; that funds would be wanting to finish the Capitol, and that in all probability Congress would meet in the President's house, which was rapidly progressing, while the foundation of the Capitol was scarcely laid.

Upon asking why the commissioners had not perfected the Canal, which was commenced with the wise intention of bringing stone, and all the materials for the public buildings, they were informed that the necessity of appropriating their funds to the public buildings had made the commissioners desist, and leave this all-important work unfinished. Some gentlemen, friends to the city, applied about eight years ago to the state of Maryland for an act, authorizing a lottery to raise funds for the opening of the canal, which was granted, though the plan failed. But without adverting to the past, let us behold the scene now exhibited. The public buildings have been prepared, and Congress has confirmed the plan of the city; the navy of the United States, now riding at anchor, has evinced the goodness of the Eastern Branch harbor, and experience has falsified all objections to it.

Congress has appropriated money to proceed with the other wing of the Capitol.

Pennsylvania avenue, which is the line of communication through the center of the city, has, by the President's patronage, now a good foot path and an excellent carriage way, and more houses have been built

upon it within these two years than in any other street of the city.

Louisiana is now obtained, and the road from New-Orleans to Boston goes in a direct line through Washington city. *Lastly, the obstructions in the Potomack, above the city, have been removed.*

The metropolis of every European country bears in general too great a proportion to its inhabitants. Paris, London, &c. are proofs of this. In America it will be found, that the principal cities of the Atlantic states progress with the population of the interior. It will naturally be asked, why the permanent seat of government has advanced so slowly? In answer let it be remembered, that at first doubts were suggested of the coming of Congress, and afterwards serious apprehensions were entertained that they would not continue in Washington city. The greatest obstacles to advancement, however, were the counteractions of Alexandria and George-Town, which, being previously established, supplied the city with building materials, goods, &c., whereby these two places have increased their population about five or six thousand.

Unfortunately, also, the public buildings, being placed at a distance from each other, created a division among the inhabitants; and the question has always been agitated, which end of the city would preponderate? If the Capitol and President's house and offices had been nearer, one common interest would have united the citizens, and a concentrated population would have appeared, advantageous and agreeable to all.

With a view to benefit the city, Congress has passed a most liberal act, granting the wharfage to the proposed canal for fifty years, on conditions which appear

at large in the accompanying act. *Vide Appendix, No. 1.*

The obstructions in the Potomack above Washington being now removed and the Monocasee opened, which flows into the Potomack, and the impediments at the mouth of the Shenandoah doing away, it is evident that most of the flour, corn, &c. now carried by waggons to Baltimore, must be conveyed by the proposed canal all through the city. The advantages contemplated to result from the intended Washington canal are as follow:

1st. Hemp, timber, flour, iron, copper, wood, stone, slate, lime and sand, potatoes, corn, &c. may be conveyed from the Potomack to the Navy-yard on the Eastern Branch, which is rapidly advancing, without taking the circuitous and hazardous route by *Turkey Buzzard* point, which requires also two tides.

2d. Wood, lumber, corn, &c. may come by water from Bladensburg and the Eastern Branch to the city and George-town.

3rd. The city all through may be supplied with every thing, from the banks of the canal, with little expense of cartage, whereas now the inhabitants near the centre are obliged to bring all they require, at a vast expense of cartage, from the extremities.

4th. The boats returning will take sugar, coffee, tea, dry goods, &c. As Congress has allowed to the canal company the same rate of wharfage as George-town, accompanying is a statement of George-town rates. *Vide Appendix, No. II.*

Though the salubrity of the city will be benefited by the canal, and though great facilities will be created by its water communications, yet I am aware that few will be induced to become subscribers, unless it can be

demonstrated by calculation, that it will yield an immediate and constantly increasing profit.

With a view to enable others to form an estimate of the probable receipts, a statement of the last census of this city has been obtained from the collector's office, whereby it appears that the population has nearly doubled in three years. With the same view, also, an estimate of the materials required for erecting brick and wooden houses of small dimensions, has been obtained, and the rates of wharfage annexed. *Vide Appendix, No. III.*

And from the two foregoing statements, a rough estimate of the immediate profits that may reasonably be expected, is submitted in *Appendix, No. IV.*

This calculation will, we trust, be deemed very moderate indeed, if it is considered that draymen and boatmen will build themselves houses, or rent them on the banks of the canal, as wood for burning of bricks, stone, lime, coal, flour, &c. will be landed there, instead of bringing them from the extremities of the city, and as these will require shops and warehouses. During the last year the greatest number of buildings have been erected along Pennsylvania avenue, and its streets in the vicinity between the public buildings. The reason is obvious: the members of Congress and visitors are equi-distant from the President's house and offices and the Capitol.

As the city, not long ago a wilderness, becomes independent of Alexandria and George-town, it will progress in a compound ratio. No sooner is a canal formed through a town or city, than stores, &c. are erected on its banks. Unless this canal is formed, Pennsylvania avenue and other central streets will only promote the extremities of the city by having all their supplies from thence; but as soon as it is effected, the boarding houses,

the houses of the public officers, the houses of ambassadors, the stores, &c. all will have their articles from the banks of the canal, and all will combine to create business and population.

Then will cease the complaint that the houses are too scattered; *then* will the streets leading from the canal shew the excellency of the plan; *then* will the inhabitants have a short, cheap and useful communication with the water; *then* will vessels come to the mouths of the canal on the Eastern branch and the Potomack, to supply stores for the city; *then* will the inhabitants who come over the bridge with marketing, obtain tea, sugar, woolens, cotton, &c. to take back; *then*, in short, will the city become independent, and constantly increasing. With magnetic influence it will attract settlers, and soon we shall see insurance offices and commercial houses established, and play houses opened: business and amusement both co-operating to make it an eligible place of residence.

The population of the United States now far exceeds six millions, and as it doubles in twenty-four years, must not the metropolis increase also?

Last year Congress, by voting a sum of money for the Capitol, and by resolving not to alter the plan of the city, banished forever all doubts, and in consequence more houses have been built since that decisive crisis than in any preceding year. As a proof of the confidence established, one proprietor whose lots are contiguous to Pennsylvania avenue, informs me that he has had *twenty times* more applications for lots this year than he ever had before.

Though the members of Congress and the President and the secretaries of treasury, navy, army, &c. and all their establishments, and the ambassadors and strangers, and the Navy-yard, expend vast sums in the city,

yet I should be doubtful whether it would become very populous, if its situation for commerce did not render it preferable to any other on the Atlantic states, New-York, perhaps, excepted.

The wise, foreseeing great man, whose name this city bears, in his last will conveyed his solemn sentiments of the great quantities of flour, copper, iron, coal, &c. which would come down the Potomack, by desiring the legatees not to sell their shares in that canal company. Examine the map, the Potomack runs in a direct line, and is navigable to Cumberland, two hundred and thirty miles. The south branch, flowing into it seventeen miles below Cumberland, is navigable one hundred miles.

Cape Capeon	sixty	miles	below	do.	is	navigable	20
Connogochegue	90	do.		do.			24
Connogochegue	90	do.		do.			24
Opecon	125	do.		do.			25
Shenandoah	130	do.		do.			150
Monocasee	150	do.		do.			40

Total navigable streams, five hundred and eighty nine.

The district of Columbia in eleven months exported 268,000 barrels of flour, and Baltimore, in six chosen months 255,000. The preference of the Potomack's communication with lake Erie, &c. to all other rivers, is fully exhibited in Mr. Jefferson's Notes on Virginia; and already a law has passed in Virginia and Maryland for a turnpike-road between the head waters of the Potomack and a branch of the Ohio, and a company is incorporated for that purpose. Hitherto many speculators have come to this city with ideas of *forcing* its improvements; henceforth it will progress by natural means.

“In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas.”

The following paragraphs from the National Intelligencer are deserving of notice:

“The public will be best informed through the medium of your paper, that the work commenced last summer on the Monocasee, is now completely finished, and that good navigation is now afforded from a distance of several miles beyond Frederick-town, down the Monocasee, to the Potomack, and thence to the city of Washington. The quantity of flour sent annually to Baltimore from the country watered by the Monocasee, has been estimated at 50,000 barrels, the whole of which must now come to Washington and George-town, as soon as boats can be prepared, and they are preparing.

“This operation on the Monocasee, by the Potomack company, is little less important than the erection of the locks at the Great Falls. The navigation of more distant parts of the river, may often be interrupted by drought, but from the Monocasee to the tide, the navigation will be good for ten months in the year, for boats of ten tons; and we may expect from this operation, not only a great increase of our flour and grain trade, but demand vastly increased for every foreign article we shall be able to supply.

“It was always the opinion of general Washington who better knew than any man the value and extent of the country connected with the Potomack and its branches, and the easy communication which nature had provided by means of the Potomack between the atlantic and western states, that a place on the Potomack about the head navigation, for ships, was destined to be the grand emporium of North America. This opinion of his has been considered visionary by superficial speculators, and to those whose interest

“it opposed, and it has even been questioned whether “the city of Washington, because it had not in eight “or ten years from its commencement, rivalled in trade “long established trading towns, could ever be com-“mercial.”

The stranger who intends establishing himself in business, examines the situation and advantages of the city, George-town and Alexandria. The first place, as I have before observed, has been heretofore a doubtful object for speculation only, and with fewer advantages for commerce than either of the other two. George-town is at the head of navigation, but is objectionable, as large vessels cannot load there, the water being too shallow, and as it is more closed by ice during the winter, and is sometimes liable to vast masses of ice, injurious to vessels. Alexandria is not more distant by water than the Eastern Branch. It has already a bank, merchants houses, &c. Should, however, the canal be accomplished, boats from the Potomack will only have about half the distance to go through a *safe communication*, whereas they are exposed to wind and waves going down to Alexandria.

More than ten years have elapsed since the city of Washington was established for the permanent seat of government, yet there is not much more commerce now than at its commencement. The obvious reasons I have assigned; and these reasons must continue to operate until some cause shall be created to induce merchants to fix themselves in this city. The question is, whether the proposed canal will effect this? and to solve this question my enquiries have been extended.

A very intelligent settler from Philadelphia has written the following letter, and many others have expressed the same sentiments:

“I do not hesitate to say, that if the canal is carried “through the city to the Eastern Branch, so that boats

“drawing six or seven feet water may conveniently pass, it will be the foundation for commerce in the branch. I am also of opinion that if the canal is completed there will be a great number of warehouses erected for the storing of flour, &c. I have no doubt, likewise, that there will be many lumber and coal yards established, as it is certainly the most central, and I believe the most convenient stand in the city for that business.”

It is now generally admitted that Alexandria can only be rivalled by the superior facility of flour boats going through the canal. Mr. Templeman’s and Mr. Stoddert’s sensible letters annexed confirm this, and all I have consulted are of the same opinion. If all interested unanimously combine the effects will be these.

1st. We shall raise funds from non-productive property, which has not yielded any profit for thirteen years, and obtain thereby the accomplishment of a work which I believe a *sine qua non*.

2d. We shall receive a canal stock, yielding an annually improving profit, and annually appreciating.

3d. The very unanimity we shew to accomplish this work will create a confidence to establish merchants among us, and to induce Congress to grant a flour inspection, a tobacco inspection, and a port of entry.*

“There is a tide in the affairs of men,

“Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.”

Mr. Latrobe’s most full and satisfactory report is received, and his estimate of the expense falls short of 40,000 dollars. It is too voluminous to annex; the following extracts are given to induce an attentive perusal of the whole, which will be submitted to the public, together with the charts, when the books will be opened.

“On the probable productiveness of this canal to the stockholders there are great temptations to form very

* This bill has passed the House of Representatives.

“sanguine conjectures. But as works of this nature “have commonly, for the first four or five years, disappointed, though they have afterwards far exceeded “the expectations of their promoters, it will not be “unfair to calculate the proceeds for the five years to “come on the building materials and firewood *only* “which the city would receive from vessels unloading “at the wharves along the canal. Upon such a calculation only the proceeds will exceed 6 per cent. on “the estimated cost. (See page of observations 17 “and 18.) In looking, however, beyond the period, “during which this city must be dependent upon neighbouring towns, a prospect of profit in proportion to “the original sum expended opens, the extent of which “is limited only by the provisions of the law. An enquiry into the future probable income of the company “is in fact an enquiry into the probability of the success of the city. Notwithstanding all that has been “predicted of ruin and desertion, this place has not “made one retrograde motion. It goes forward with a “silent and a slow, but with a certain pace. The constitution of this establishment must surely be vigorous which, in its first infancy, has been able to resist “the untoward circumstances which have attended it “from its origin. It is in the nature of things that “its future steps should be more rapid than those that “are past.

“The improvement of the city and the productiveness of the canal depend mutually on each other. “The very wants of the city, merely considered as a “collection of inhabited houses without commerce and “without manufactures, is sufficient to authorize the undertaking by offering at least legal interest for the “monies expended. But when the canal shall be completed the city will hold out inducements to the settlement of merchants which do not at present exist.”